

YOUTH FOR JUSTICE

Best Practices in Law-Related Education

Research in law-related education and the experiences of myriad law, civics, and government teachers have produced a set of best practices in law-related education. These best practices, taken together, answer the question "What does good law-related/civic education look like?"

LRE programs that incorporate best practices:

- **Focus on essential LRE knowledge and skills.** LRE knowledge includes legal literacy focusing on civil, criminal, and constitutional themes; practical information about the law and public policy; and concepts underlying our constitutional democracy. LRE skills include critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, communication, cooperation, and reasoning.
- **Judicious selection and presentation of issues and materials.** Materials should be selected so that they provide a balanced view of the judicial system and other aspects of our political system. Controversy is also important, as it motivates student interest. Finally, treatment of legal and constitutional issues should be characterized by depth of analysis.
- **Sufficient quantity of instruction.** While "sufficient quantity" is not a precisely defined term, programs where LRE is a semester course or is carefully integrated into a yearlong course would certainly qualify. Particularly intense programs of shorter duration may also be effective.
- **Use of hands-on, active teaching strategies,** particularly strategies that foster true student interaction (and thus affect friendship choices). Other characteristics of sound instruction (sharing objectives with students, drawing on students' existing knowledge, multiple opportunities to practice skills, etc.) are also important.
- **Repeated opportunities for students to interact with community resource persons** who have been well prepared for constructive interaction with students. The content presented by resource persons should be integrated with course content and the principal mode of visitors' activities should involve interaction with students.
- **Active involvement of administrators.** Administrators are involved in providing classroom resources, facilitating field experiences, and dealing with concerns voiced by other teachers or members of the community. Involvement of administrators can also serve to reduce the gap between school governance policies and ideas about justice and procedural due process that may be generated in LRE classes.
- **Support networks for teachers.** Joint planning sessions and social events reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen teachers' commitment to use LRE methods and teach LRE content. The involvement of more than one teacher from a site in training helps to enhance and strengthen the LRE program.